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22 APRIL 1972

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DIRECTORATE OF
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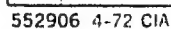
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SOUTH VIETNAM: There was heavy fighting on all three major battlefronts yesterday. Although South Vietnamese forces are counterattacking in some areas, much of the latest action is Communist-initiated.

An Loc is still under siege, and the heavy enemy shellings have become increasingly accurate. Allied air support has been severely hampered by poor weather and has not yet silenced Communist artillery positions. South Vietnamese resupply efforts have also been largely unsuccessful, and evacuation of wounded South Vietnamese troops remains a serious problem. A captured enemy document indicates that as of 18 April the Communists remained determined to capture An Loc. While admitting poor coordination between their infantry and armored units, a senior officer of the Communist 9th Division expressed confidence that they could take the town. The Communists currently control approximately 20 percent of An Loc.

In the northern portion of the country, the situation at the district town of Hiep Duc in Quang Tin Province remains critical, with the town's defenders now withdrawn from the outer defensive perimeter into the headquarters compound. The nearby provincial capital of Quang Ngai was shelled early yesterday, and the Communists are attempting to isolate the city by knocking out bridges along Route 1 south of town and by disrupting traffic to the north.

In MR-2, a tank-led enemy attack forced the South Vietnamese to abandon a fire support base on Rocket Ridge in Kontum Province. There has been considerable movement of Communist units in the vicinity of Kontum city, southeast of the ridge, and an attack on the city remains a distinct possibility. Enemy shelling attacks were reported in other sectors of MR-2, chiefly in northern Binh Dinh Province.

Communist mortar attacks and ground probes continue throughout the delta provinces. (SECRET NO FOREIGN DISSEM)

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CHILE: The elections next week at the University of Chile are an important test of strength between the Allende government and its opposition.

Edgardo Boeninger, who is up for re-election as rector, is supported by the Christian Democrats, the National Party, and other opposition groups. Felipe Herrera, former head of the Inter-American Development Bank, was personally chosen by President Allende as the candidate of the parties of his Popular Unity government. Making it a four-way race are two spoilers on the far left, one of them Allende's nephew, Andres Pascal, who is running for the Castroite Movement of the Revolutionary Left.

Both Boeninger and Herrera have support outside the groups they represent and both are considered competent by their colleagues. While the campaign is ostensibly being fought over university reorganization, the real issue is whether the new administration will resist greater government control of the university. At the moment, Boeninger, the anti-government candidate who would take the more independent line, may have a slight edge. The result will be considered by many Chileans as an indicator of Allende's political strength. (SECRET NO FOREIGN DISSEM)

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CZECHOSLOVAKIA: Moscow may have intervened to ease the reported rivalry between party chief Gustav Husak and Vasil Bilak, considered to be the number two man in the party and chief rival to Husak.

Bilak, in a routine speech to a trade union meeting this week, suddenly denied that differences exist between himself and Husak and stated that he personally holds Husak in esteem. The existence of a power struggle has been reported frequently [REDACTED]

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Despite Bilak's disclaimer, his remarks convey the impression that significant differences do exist. His statement that "false flattery and unprincipled evasion of problems...always lead to serious consequences" is an obvious reference to the "cult of personality" and serves notice that Husak's authority may be under challenge.

The US Embassy in Prague reports that there have been "rumors" since late February that Husak secretly journeyed to Moscow at that time to complain to Brezhnev about the activities of his most powerful presidium colleague, although there is no evidence that he was in Moscow at that time. Husak was not seen in Czechoslovakia between 23 February, when he attended a party plenum, and 1 March. He missed the important celebration marking the Communist coup of 1948.

On 22 March Bilak himself was invited to Moscow for a talk with Brezhnev, who may have suggested that he find some public forum in which to demonstrate his support of Husak. Husak's performance since taking over in 1969 apparently has satisfied Moscow, and the Soviets may have taken action to assure his continued hold on the party leadership.

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FRANCE: Although assured of victory in Sunday's referendum on Common Market expansion, the government has campaigned briskly to limit the number of abstentions. The latest opinion poll, which shows 35 percent planning to abstain, reflects the apathy of a public that feels the enlargement issue is already settled. If abstentions are kept at about that level and if--as the poll suggests--74 percent of those who go to the polls vote yes, President Pompidou can interpret the vote as a strong mandate for his European policy. He has already divided the opposition on the left, and a clear victory will undercut his orthodox Gaullist critics on the right. (CONFIDENTIAL)

* * * *

LEBANON: Voters in two provinces, the South and Biqa, go to the polls tomorrow in the second of three rounds of parliamentary elections. Elections in the north and Beirut last week went smoothly and produced few surprises, except for the election of one Nasirist candidate in Beirut. Pre-election activities in Biqa Province, on the other hand, have already resulted in three deaths, and the area has been designated a military zone. The presence of fedayeen in both provinces increases the possibility of incidents during the elections. (CONFIDENTIAL)

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